

Eleven and the La-Z-Boy by theamiableanachronism

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Eleven and the La-Z-Boy

"Are you sure you'll be fine while I'm gone?"

Mrs. Wheeler's brow wrinkled as she adjusted her purse strap on her shoulder. She stood facing Mike and El, hands gently resting on her hips, in the entryway of the Wheeler house. El was over for a visit this Saturday morning, but without Will this time. He and Dustin were working on a project for school back home. Honestly, Mike was secretly glad that he got to spend some time with just El for a change.

"Mom, we'll be fine," Mike sighed, rolling his eyes. El smiled and nodded in agreement. Mrs. Wheeler clicked her tongue and sighed.

"Well, all right. I'll be back in about an hour. I have to pick up Holly and then I'm going to stop at the store."

She stepped forward to plant a kiss on Mike's hair, making him smile sheepishly and put his hands in his pockets, embarrassed in front of El, but she only smiled fondly.

"You help yourself to anything you'd like, all right, El?" Mrs. Wheeler said, gently squeezing El's shoulder.

El nodded. "Thank you," she said quietly, shyly looking down at her hands clasped in front of her. She caught Mike's eye and he simply beamed for her. El looked back at his mother and returned her encouraging smile.

"If you need anything," she said, opening the door and stepping outside, looking back over her shoulder, "Call Mrs. Sinclair next door. Dad's at the hardware store again."

Mother and son rolled their eyes. "Okay, Mom," he grinned, gently ushering her out the door, his hand on the doorknob. "See you later."

"See you later," she replied, smiling fondly. "Bye El!"

"Bye!" she called as the door clicked shut. Mike twirled on his heels to face El, beaming, hands back in his pockets.

"So what do you want to do first, El?"

"Where are Nancy and Holly?" she asked curiously as they walked to the living room.

"Oh, Holly had a playdate this morning or something." He shrugged. "I think Nancy went to do something with Jonathan. How about some TV?" Mike suggested. She shrugged and nodded. It wasn't her favorite and Mike knew it. TV was too loud and had so many flashing lights. It was hard for her to focus on anything that was happening. Idiot, he thought.

"We don't have to do that, though," he said quickly. "There's never anything good on anyway," he admitted with a shrug.

She looked away into the living room then back to him. "Maybe the radio?" she said tentatively.

"The radio?" He smiled. El loved the radio, always humming along with the music. It was kind of cool how fast she could start humming along with songs she'd never heard before in her life.

But El was amazing like that.

"Okay. I'll go get it. I think it's in Nancy's room." He started to leave then turned around. "You can have the La-Z-Boy if you want. I'll be right back."

He bit his lip to keep from laughing as he heard the creak of the La-Z-Boy as she practically ran to sit in it. It was her favorite chair in the whole living room. She would settle into it, reaching over the side and pulling the lever that sent the chair springing back. It always sent her into giggles, the same ones that were following him up the stairs now.

Mike slowly walked into Nancy's room and grabbed the radio. She wouldn't mind. Anyway, it was for El.

He sped down the stairs and into the living room to find El rocking back and forth in the recliner, giggling uncontrollably. Her happiness was contagious and he found himself smiling so broadly it made his face hurt.

It wasn't until after the chair had completely stopped rocking and he noticed El looking expectantly at him that he realized he hadn't moved at all and was standing in a daze smiling at her.

"Got it!" he said, holding up the radio. He shook his head as he walked into the living room, trying to ignore the butterflies in his stomach and the heat in his face. "What did you want to hear?" he asked, sitting down on the couch and switching on the radio. He started to tune in a station, rolling through waves of static. He had finally broken through to some quiet guitar music when El cried, "Mike!"

"Yeah?" His head snapped up to see El bound out of the La-Z-Boy and grab his arm, pulling him off the couch and back into the recliner with her. It was nowhere near big enough for both of them and they were sitting awkwardly half in the seat and half on the arms of the chair.

"El, what are you doing?" he giggled as it rocked back and forth with the impact of their arrival. "We can't both fit, you kno-"

El just smiled at him and he was cut off by the sound of the lever chunking back followed by a loud CRACK.

The world tipped as the chair snapped back. It rocked wildly and he watched El's hand fly up, clutching the lever. Mike clapped a hand over his mouth to cover the inexplicable grin and laugh he felt starting to bubble out of him. "Oh no..." he said, his hand muffling the sound. It had snapped off perfectly. It didn't even look like anything was wrong with it, except for the fact that it was in El's hand and not attached to the chair.

But the bigger problem was the horrified look on El's face as she realized what had just happened. Mike kicked himself internally for saying anything because she only looked more scared, her eyes opened so wide he could see the whites all around. She probably thought she'd broken the chair. She opened her mouth to say something, but nothing came out. All she could do was stare at the lever and then at him. She swallowed and tried again.

"Mike, I'm sorr-"

"Nonononono!" he said, the need to reassure her tumbling out of him. "Nonono, it's all right El! Really!" Gently, he touched her shoulder. "It's all right," he repeated, looking into her eyes.

She didn't look convinced.

"Look, I'll bet we can fix it." He held out his hand and after a moment, she gingerly handed him the lever.

"Just hold on a minute." He clambered off the side of the recliner, setting it rocking again, and walked around to the other side. El's eyes followed him and she turned her head to watch him, biting her lip, her eyes still extremely wide. He crouched down next to the chair and she curled her knees up underneath her, leaning over the arm of the chair. Her eyes kept darting back and forth from the lever to his face.

He swallowed and looked at the lever. There was a hole that exactly matched shape of the knob sticking out of the side of the recliner. He sighed in relief and smiled up at El. Her fingers were curled on the arm of the chair and her knuckles were white. He covered one of her hands with one of his and held up the lever in the other.

"Hey, look, El. It just snapped off. It's okay. It fits right back on here." He pointed at the knob. "Here. Watch this."

With a click, he snapped it back into place. She raised her eyebrows.

"See?" Some of the worry left her face and her shoulders started to relax, but she still looked skeptical.

He held up his hand. "Hold on, sit back." She did and he chunked the lever. The recliner snapped back just as before. There was her laugh again. A little hesitant, but there all the same, and it made him realize that he'd been just as tense as she was, his shoulders hunched up. He felt them relax at the sound of her voice.

"See? No problem." He grinned, throwing his hands up.

She beamed. "No problem," she repeated.

He sighed in relief. He hated when she would get worried like that.

She always acted like he was going to be so angry but he could never be angry at her. He knew she didn't deserve that. He just wanted her to be happy, especially after everything she'd been through with scientists and monsters and the Upside Down. She'd only gotten home five months ago. She'd been in the Upside Down for a year. A whole year. Now that she was here all he wanted was for her to know that she'd always be safe here. He hoped she'd be happy too, like she was now. The tension had completely left her and she was nodding her head to the music softly playing from the radio on the couch. She deserved all the happiness in the world. She was the nicest, sweetest person he knew.

She closed her eyes and started humming along with the music. A warm glowing feeling filled his chest and he felt a little light-headed. It happened all the time now whenever she was around. The chair had stopped rocking and she sat cross-legged, her hands clasped in her lap.

Suddenly, he leaned over the arm of the chair and kissed her on the cheek.

It even surprised him, a swooping feeling sweeping through his stomach. A blush spread across both of their faces and they both smiled, sheepish and pleased at the same time.

He stayed there on the floor next to the chair, just listening to El's quiet humming. After a minute, she leaned over the side of the chair and reached down to grab his hand. She interlaced her fingers with his and rested their clasped hands on the arm. El gently rocked the chair and it almost seemed to creak in time with the soft music. He squeezed her hand and she did the same.

Eventually, they both fell asleep, El curled in a ball and Mike leaning against the chair, and that's how Mrs. Wheeler and Holly found them when they got home; fast asleep and holding hands.